



ADVENT 2020

Hope is our midwife

A midwife walks alongside us at the threshold of change. From birthing new life to grieving death. There are midwives in hospice as well as in birth centers. Hope is our “accompanier” and “coach” at these thresholds. *At this threshold.*

Hope is rending, preparing, anointing and calling us into this holy moment of transformation when Emmanuel - God with Us - is born in our midst.

These are simple meditations that don't require significant preparation or supplies other than a candle and sometimes a basic household object. They are made for everyone, young and old.

You can engage in these meditation at any day or night of your choosing throughout the week. You might choose the same time each week, as that helps you or your household look forward to the ritual, as it begins to settle into your soul.



Advent 2020

An introduction

In each week of advent, as we wait for the coming Jesus, we walk through the passages of Isaiah that connect us across time to the birth story of Jesus.

Isaiah was known to be a prophet, (*someone who spoke the truth that people sometimes didn't want to hear*). His narrative and prophetic tradition spoke to the Israelites in a time when they were cut off from their homeland, from everything they knew. In their despair, Isaiah paints them a picture of a future Shalom: peace in creation and relationships, where what is broken is restored, those who are hurt are healed, and those who do the breaking are confronted.

The end of the Isaiah narrative points to the time when the Israelites began to realize that reconnecting with their homeland was not a guaranteed pathway to holy connection, but rather more connection to all people might begin to unlock what they were looking for. Isaiah's image of Shalom envisioned the Israelites in abundant community with strangers and foreigners. That was a new and radical idea for the Israelites at the time, as many believed that God's love and favor depended on their bloodline, (or who their ancestors were and what tribe they were a part of). Isaiah's image foretold a new kind of Shalom and wholeness that stretched God's goodness far and wide to every nook and cranny of humanity, connecting us all within it.

All over the story of the birth of Jesus are intentional reminders of this history of exile and return - the story is filled with poetic images of bringing the low high and the high low. We see the characters in the story of Jesus' birth calling back to this prophecy in Isaiah, reminding people how historically unequal things have been. Reminding the Hebrew people, that this struggle is a part of their DNA. And part of the promise this time is to level the struggle. To reset the order to a new Way.

You'll notice that story woven throughout the weeks... even into the Gospel passages at the end of Advent and into Christmas.

First week of Advent

Hope rends

Light the first candle of advent.

As you enter into this sacred space,
notice the flame of the candle.

Fire gives light and warmth.
It is also ferocious and chaotic.

How is this light moving tonight?

As you feel comfortable, Let your
bodies mirror the movement of the
flame... waving, vibrating, moving.

Then, breathe together
before you begin.

FIND

- a piece of paper for each person
- a writing or coloring utensil.

READ

Isaiah 64:1-5

*You can read all the way through verse 9
if you like, for a bit more of the story.*

what do you hear?
What do you wonder?

As you end your grounding time, use a
snuffer or gently blow to put out the
candles.

Then, watch what happens after the
flame goes out. The light is still there,
just different.

Take a moment of breath to watch as the
smoke from the flame fills the room.

The light is all around us now.

We begin the first week of advent always with scripture that points to an “undoing”. Why might we need undoing?

In some translations, verse 1 reads “oh that you would rend the heavens and come down.” The people of God that Isaiah was speaking to were coming now coming out of exile and facing a “homeland” much less comfortable than they imagined: there were *other* people of God there too! They were so uncomfortable that they were asking, *pleading* for God to “undo” their world to fix things. To rend means to separate and tear apart suddenly... often violently.

The people of God wanted things to look different. Probably not everyone around them was wanting that same drastic change. There were likely people that were quite comfortable with things as they were. What would change mean for their comfort? What does change mean for our comfort?

The hope of Christmas - of Jesus’ birth- is that God might bring about transformation to change hurt and hunger and pain into healing, fullness and wholeness.

Before that begins, we (all of us) have to be ready. Ready to be changed. Ready to let go.

Remember back to last Christmas season. On your piece of paper, write or draw all the comforts you and your neighbors had- The things that made us feel safe and comfortable and occupied. Maybe some are comforts you don’t have in the same way now. Maybe they are things or systems that you have noticed seem to keep others safe and comfortable but not necessarily everyone. (like traditions, the economy, white-supremacy etc.)

Take time to talk about those things together as a household. Now, practice what it might be like to have God rend our lives for the sake of this transformational power.

For the sake of transforming the world. Without thinking or strategy, grab the paper and quickly tear it in two. Where did it tear? What got separated? *Leave your pieces up somewhere visible this week as you begin your waiting for Christmas.*

Know that God accompanies us in our waiting. God is that nurse, midwife, mother, auntie, grandmother by our bedside walking with us in our discomfort as things get shaken out before new life comes. God is that friendly stranger, the public defender, the aid worker; walking with those whose pain and plight are about to turn upside down.

Second week of Advent

Hope prepares

Light two candles.

As you enter into this sacred space, notice the flame of the candles.

Fire gives light and warmth.
It is also ferocious and chaotic.

How is this light moving tonight?

As you feel comfortable, Let your bodies mirror the movement of the flame... waving, vibrating, moving.

Then, breathe together before you begin.

FIND

An object that brings you comfort. It can be emotional comfort, physical comfort, a comfortable memory- anything from a picture to warm fuzzy socks!

READ

Isaiah 40:1-5

You can read all the way through verse 11 if you like, for a bit more of the story.

As you read, hold your object and listen to the words of comfort that are spoken.

Pick one or two words or phrases in this Scripture that sound like comfort, that maybe remind you of the “comfort” you are holding. Share those words with each other.

As you end your grounding time, use a snuffer or gently blow to put out the candles.

Then, watch what happens after the flame goes out. The light is still there, just different.

Take a moment of breath to watch as the smoke from the flame fills the room.

The light is all around us now.

Change can be very painful at times, even if the end result is something beautiful. Change is something that we often prepare ourselves for.

When a mother is pregnant with a baby, she has to give up some things to grow the new life inside of her (certain food, hobbies, exercises, drinks), and when the baby is born, there is pain and hurt and tears. But there are things a mommy can hold onto- the hands of the people who love her, a favorite blanket, her friends, a picture of a growing family- and, while none of those things can take away the pain and grief that come with change and letting things go, they do comfort her when things are hard. Hope is a lot like that.

Hope prepares us for the things we may have to let go of to make room for change. Hope holds our hand through the “now” so that we can be ready for the “not yet.” Advent is about this waiting space, the one where we are looking toward something better. Hope is our guide when we are in that in-between place.

Right now, you might be in a place of grief and pain and hurt and loss. This holiday season might already be filled with disappointment; with things you have had to let go of and expectations that you have had to change.

As you hold your ‘comfort’ items talk with your family, your friends, your ‘quarantine’ bubble, or journal:

What are you grieving now?

What loss or sacrifices are you experiencing that are especially hard right now? What are some things that you miss?

What brings you comfort in the “right now”?

And what is hope gently reminding you to look toward?

What are you hoping for?

(In the next week, month, year, or ten years, even!?)

What are you eagerly waiting for?

Third week of Advent

Hope anoints

Light three candles.

As you enter into this sacred space, notice the flame of the candles.

Fire gives light and warmth.
It is also ferocious and chaotic.

How is this light moving tonight?

As you feel comfortable, Let your bodies mirror the movement of the flame... waving, vibrating, moving.

Then, breathe together before you begin.

READ

Isaiah 61:1-5

You can read all the way through verse 11 if you like, for a bit more of the story.

As you read, have each person in your household listen for the phrase that feels the MOST hopeful or exciting to them.

Now, let's fast-forward for a moment, from this vision in Isaiah, past when Jesus was born, to when Jesus was an adult!

As you end your grounding time, use a snuffer or gently blow to put out the candles.

Then, watch what happens after the flame goes out. The light is still there, just different.

Take a moment of breath to watch as the smoke from the flame fills the room.

The light is all around us now.

In Luke 4, Jesus came back to Nazareth where he grew up- back among the people who knew him when he was little. Jesus had already begun healing and teaching and news of what he was up to had spread. So it was a big deal that he was back in town. Everyone was talking about it. On Sunday morning he went to the synagogue (similar to going to church), and stood up to read.

Someone handed him a scroll, and Jesus opened it and read it to the crowd. *Have someone from your household take the paper and read it as though you are Jesus reading in front of the crowd.*

The Spirit of our God is upon me.

Because the Most High has chosen me to bring Good News to the poor.

To proclaim freedom for those who are captive.

To heal the brokenhearted.

To allow the blind to see again,

To free those who are burdened and mistreated.

The Lord has sent me to proclaim:

THIS is the year God will set this people free.

*Wait.... sound familiar? This was the very scroll written by Isaiah long, long ago. Jesus is reminding the Hebrew people that this struggle is a part of their DNA. He is speaking hope into existence- part of the promise this time is to level the struggle. To reset the order to a new Way. Jesus is foretelling the hope he is to live for and call us to join him in. The hope that was foretold way back then by Isaiah. **It is time.***

A hush fell on the crowd and every eye was fixed on Jesus. He rolled the scroll up, handed it to the assistant and said "You've just heard Scripture make history. It came true just now in this place." (*Mic drop*)

What do you think it felt like to hear these words?

To hear Jesus say that this prediction from so long ago was COMING TRUE? How do you think people reacted? (*Read Luke 4:22-30 on if you want to SEE how people reacted. Spoiler alert: its pretty intense.*)

Think of the phrase that felt MOST hopeful to you from Isaiah. Imagine it coming true. What would it look like? How would it feel? Imagine you were a part of it coming true- how might you be involved?

The Spirit of the Lord is upon you.

Hope anoints the way before you, mirroring the way your body is created for this movement: to bring peace, to proclaim gospel, to let prisoners free.

We are named even before we become. We are known even before we know ourselves. We are anointed by hope.

Fourth week of Advent

Hope calls

Light four candles.

As you enter into this sacred space, notice the flame of the candles.

Fire gives light and warmth.

It is also ferocious and chaotic.

How is this light moving tonight?

As you feel comfortable, Let your bodies mirror the movement of the flame... waving, vibrating, moving.

Then, breathe together before you begin.

READ

Luke 1:26-38

As you read, imagine yourself as a human in the story, hearing from the angel. Notice of all the things that would be hard to believe if you heard them. What impossible things is Mary being called to believe?

What do you hear? What do you wonder?

As you end your grounding time, use a snuffer or gently blow to put out the candles.

Then, watch what happens after the flame goes out. The light is still there, just different.

Take a moment of breath to watch as the smoke from the flame fills the room.

The light is all around us now.

The mystery of Jesus' kingdom is that it is something we are waiting for AND it is at hand- it is HERE. Both are true at the same time. Hope calls us to reach out and take hold of the change, the life, the abundance, the promise that is right in front of us.

Hope calls to us through our fear, our disappointment, our grief, and reminds us that it is *here*.

Hope is not meant to replace our grief, but rather to come alongside it; it makes our grief bearable and our joys more beautiful. And this is the tension of this time of waiting, of Advent.

We know something beautiful is coming- the Angel has declared to Mary that her son- this miracle, this God with Skin on, this unbelievable, messy promise- is on its way.

Hope calls us to believe in promises that may feel out of reach; to believe that the darkness is being pushed back, to believe that God is in on the move, even when we can't see it.

Hope calls us to risk our cynicism and our disbelief for something else.

Hope calls us a times to risk feeling and looking foolish by seeing the world for what it could be instead of what is.

Hope rends. Hope prepares. Hope anoints. Hope calls.

Hope accompanies us through the unraveling, the re-remembering, the labor pains, and the first steps of new life- Hope does not leave us to walk alone.

"We are not called to be the kind of people who bury our heads in the sand and pretend that horrible things are not happening around us. God calls us to be the kind of people who can look at the tragedy, the fear, the terror, the evil, the injustice, and the intimidation and still walk in true hope... it takes courage to look out into the dark and know that God is not done yet." - Pastor Jonathan Martin

Why is it scary to hope sometimes? Why might it feel like a risk to hope? What is hope calling you to take hold of, to believe in, or move toward?

No-Pressure! Totally Optional! Just for fun! Not required!

Advent Crafts

Rainbow Scratch Ornaments

Using the stick or an unsharpened pencil, coin or other hard pointed edge, scratch designs into the angel and the star. If you have enough ornaments on your tree, consider mailing to a friend or family member who you know could use some Christmas cheer (and kid art!).

Jar Nativity Silhouette

You'll need your own jar (mason, pickle, etc.) and another candle. You can glue/paint the tissue paper in collage pieces onto the outside of the jar before attaching the nativity decal to the outside of the jar. Then, set a candle in and light to see the play between shadow and light!

No-Pressure! Totally Optional! Just for fun! Not required!

Advent Crafts

Rainbow Scratch Ornaments

Using the stick or an unsharpened pencil, coin or other hard pointed edge, scratch designs into the angel and the star. If you have enough ornaments on your tree, consider mailing to a friend or family member who you know could use some Christmas cheer (and kid art!).

Jar Nativity Silhouette

You'll need your own jar (mason, pickle, etc.) and another candle. You can glue/paint the tissue paper in collage pieces onto the outside of the jar before attaching the nativity decal to the outside of the jar. Then, set a candle in and light to see the play between shadow and light!